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"Church Federation an Answer to the Call of God."

An Address Delivered by Rev. Edward G. Selden, D. D., of the Madison Avenue Reformed Church of Albany, at the Anniversary of the State Federation Society, November, 1902.

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WE give cordial welcome to the Federation of Churches. We are beginning to hope great things from its efforts to reduce waste and friction in the work of our churches, and to increase those moral and religious influences on which the welfare of society depends.

The welcome of all good people will be unreserved when it is understood that the schemes under discussion are not Utopian, not wild and visionary, but simple and practicable. There will be no attempt to abolish denominations, but only to hold in check denominationalism. The apostles gave counsel to respect the powers that be, and we are wililng to apply the injunction to the denominations that be. They have an existence which must be recognized. They have been, they are, and for a long time they are to be. Perhaps there are more than the world imperatively needs, but they have some reason for being and they are of some value. For one thing they are historical, and on some pages of their records can be read splendid deeds of devotion and heroism. In the beginning of every denomination men were intensely interested in the truth and eager to advance the cause of pure religion Much abides of the early enthusiasm. Then the denominations are in running order· They are all working well. Organizations have been perfected and set in operation for the prosecution of

special enterprises at home and abroad. And it must be confessed that the sentiment of attachment and loyalty which binds individuals and families in each denomination is a thing of moral worth. There is no thought of rudely, one might almost say irreverently, destroying the work of centuries—and yet there has come to be a frank and intelligent recognition of the evils which now attend the excessive development of denominationalism and the undesirable multiplication of churches. The principle of individualism has been carried to its logical extreme. Anybody who had a conscience and a mind of his own has been allowed to devise and execute a plan for a new sect. The world has been diversified by seventeen kinds of Methodists, thirteen sorts of Baptists, twelve species of Lutherans, and as many divisions of Presbyterians. Some of the original points of division have been forgotten, and in fact, all the lines of separation have become faint. Yet our cherished denominations, forty-six in all, persist. The consequence is overlapping of parishes and a serious competition for favor and material substance. We have indulged our tastes and even our fancies in religious matters until the needs of the world cry ont against our folly. The tendency of the age is toward combination for the sake of economy and efficiency, but the children of the world are wiser than the children of light; and even where the gross superstitions of the heathen are beclouding the lives of millions, we divide and subdivide our forces, leaving each little army to institute its own campaigns on the common field. We

have twenty-six Christian missionary organizations in Japan, thirty-eight in India, and thirty-nine in China. They are beginning to feel that it is hardly worth while to work in independence of each other on the great mission fields, and of late it has been in order to confer regarding general and co-operative plans of work. Out on the firing line, in the face of a stubborn resistance, they do not scan too closely the color and cut of uniforms. They are only anxious for mutual understanding and mutual support in the enterprise that is testing their courage and taxing their resources.

Here in the homeland the pressure of needs is becoming too great to allow us comfort in a denominationalism which was once an unchallenged right. It is impossible to make much of ecclesiasticism when dealing with the masses whose greatest need is a simple gospel, or when pondering over the great social problems of the day. We must make less of beliefs and more of belief, and combine in a covenant of works. We must learn to be charitable toward each other, practical in all our measures, and deadly in earnest about the business of regenerating human society. We must cry out on the spirit of exclusiveness and away with all diversive practices. We must use all of our wits to invent schemes for co-operation in Christian work, and we must employ all of our spiritual resources in order to maintain perfect friendship while we work side by side and hand in hand for the kingdom of Christ, for the cause of humanity.